

Daniel De Leon

Editorial: Swallowing a Camel, and Straining at a Gnat

The *Voice*, organ of the Prohibition party, is greatly exercised over the murder of three “prominent citizens” of Muscatine, Ia., who were attempting to enforce the liquor laws, and it issues to the public an address stating that “aside from all division of opinion in regard to Prohibition, High License, and other forms of legal treatment, it is important that some effective protest should be made against such a course of diabolism as is here revealed. Surely there can be no division of opinion among patriotic citizens as to the necessity of rebuking such assaults upon life and property, and such defiance of law.”

This is straining at a gnat after the *Voice*’s habitual swallowing of a camel.

The organ of a party in which capitalists and landlords like Standard Oil Treasurer W.T. Wardwell, Jennings Demorest, Bank President Fred F. Wheeler, Factory Boss Fred Gates, Labor-Exploiting H. Clay Bascom, and numerous others of this stripe are prominent and honored members; the paper that has only sophistical articles for the movement that is up in arms against the robbery, murder and rapine committed by Capitalism on a wholesale scale upon the people,—such a paper can not without rendering itself ridiculous and even contemptible strike the attitude of outraged morality at a local affair in which three “prominent” citizens are killed.

For each one of these three “prominencies,” at whose taking off the *Voice* is so indignant, at least one million human

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beings—probably not “prominent citizens” though—but human beings all the same, have been slaughtered by the life-killing capitalist system of exploitation, and millions and upon millions are every day the victims of that capitalist assault upon their property which consists in piling up profits, i.e., in piling up withheld wages from Labor. It was Huxley, we think, who estimated that nine-tenths of the working people die of slow starvation, and, unreliable as the statistics are, even they show that the working class is plundered of three-fourths of its products by the idle capitalist class.

Against this wholesale system of diabolism the *Voice* is silent as the tomb; and its Prohibition leaders, who affect morality as their distinguishing characteristic, are leaders also in that social class that practises this wholesale brigandage. While they quote the Bible like genuine pharisees, they trample upon its behests; while they quibble over whether the wine that Jesus produced was or was not fermented, they practise the usury denounced by scripture; while they quote the Apostles whose companions were not the “prominent citizens” of the time, their indignation rises, not at the wholesale butcheries of the common people, but at the retail killing of a few “prominent citizens;” while they had not a word of earnest denunciation but only platitudes, for that flagrant and wide-reaching defiance of law committed by Capital at Homestead, they are furious at the petty “defiance of law” committed by a few rum sellers.

We do not share the *Voice’s* indignation. What happened at Muscatine is the legitimate outcome of the existing system of exploitation which the *Voice* itself upholds. The blood of the Muscatine victims lies upon the head of the *Voice* itself together with all other papers and bodies who defend a social system under which humanity is on the cross.

The Socialists of the land have no tears to spare for petty self-inflicted sorrows, and no time to waste upon cart-before-the-horse reforms. All their feelings, all their efforts, all their time, are devoted to the redemption of the common people—the

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working proletariat of the country; to the overthrow of a social system that breeds crime, and that promotes such hypocrisy as the *Voice* is guilty of.

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*A De Leon editorial transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the
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